



Euroopan unionin
osarahoittama

The oral health and self-care of a family expecting a baby

Odottavan perheen suun terveys ja omahoito



Pregnancy

The oral health of the parent who is expecting a baby may change during pregnancy. This is due to changes in hormonal activity. Bleeding gums may occur even more. Careful brushing of teeth and a healthy diet are important for the parent who is expecting a baby. Oral diseases can increase the risk of pregnancy complications.



Good oral health is important for expectant parents. Parents expecting their first child can book a free appointment for dental care. During the visit, you will receive individual instructions.

Oral bacteria

Oral diseases are not hereditary, rather they are caused by oral bacteria. Bacteria can be seen and felt as dirt on the tooth. Brushing your teeth keeps bacteria away from the tooth.



The bacteria in your mouth are transmitted to the child. Bacterial infection is contracted through saliva. Think about the situations in which saliva contact can occur. Often, they are eating situations, such as cooling food in your own mouth or using the same cutlery. Make sure that the child has their own cutlery. Try the warmth of the food, for example, on the inside of the wrist. Could you kiss your child on the cheek instead of the mouth? What do you do if the pacifier falls on the floor?



Bacteria only cause a cavity in the tooth when you eat sugary foods a lot and frequently, and when the teeth are dirty. A regular meal rhythm, a healthy diet and careful brushing of teeth prevent tooth decay.

Tooth development

The development of a milk teeth begins already during pregnancy. The fetus begins to develop milk tooth motifs as early as the 4th or 5th week of pregnancy. The first milk tooth erupts about at the age of 4-12 months. The age at which the first tooth erupts varies. A 3-year-old has a total of 20 milk teeth. The last milk teeth may not be replaced by permanent teeth until adolescence. In other words, milk teeth are in the mouth for a long time. Milk teeth are more susceptible to cavities than permanent teeth. Decay of milk teeth causes children, for example, pain and eating problems.



A good foundation for oral self-care habits is created in early childhood. Start brushing your child's teeth as soon as the first tooth erupts. Brush baby's teeth in the morning and evening. Choose a small, soft brush. Use a fluoride toothpaste intended for children. Fluoride strengthens teeth and protects teeth from cavities. A small swipe of paste is enough. You can buy toothbrushes and toothpaste at grocery stores.

The responsibility for brushing a child's teeth lies with the adult. The adult must brush the child's teeth until the age of 12.

The toothbrush is replaced with a new toothbrush at least every three months. If the bristles are worn or turned to the sides, replace the brush with a new one earlier. A toothbrush is personal.

Baby's nutrition

At first, the child's nutrition is breast milk or infant formula.

Breastfeeding is good for the growth of the child's jaw. You can get support for breastfeeding from the child health clinic if you have challenges with breastfeeding. Breastfeeding a baby takes place at the child's pace. If breastfeeding continues after the child turns one year, it is important to also provide the child other healthy nutrition.

Breast milk or infant formula alone is not enough for a child over 1 year of age.

A one-year-old child can follow the same eating rhythm as the rest of the family. Breast milk can be given with meals. Breast milk eliminates the feeling of hunger, which is why it is important to breastfeed a child over 1 year of age only after eating. A one-year-old child does not need milk at night. When breastfeeding a toddler, repeated breastfeeding sessions during the day and at night can cause cavities in the child's teeth.



Biscuits, sweets and pastries contain a lot of sugar. Lemonades and juices also contain added sugar. Dried fruits and salty snacks stick to your teeth. **Avoid giving these to your child, especially in early childhood.** Don't add sugar or honey to your child's food or drinks.

Baby bottle and pacifier

The baby is only offered milk or water from the baby bottle.

Sweetened drinks served from a baby bottle cause severe decay of milk teeth.



Replace the baby bottle with a regular cup at about one year of age. The use of a sippy cup is not recommended. Teach your child to drink from a mug as soon as possible.

Wean your child off the use of a pacifier at the age of 1.5–2 years at the latest. The easiest age to stop using a pacifier can be around 6–8 months of age. Make sure that the child does not start sucking their thumb instead of the pacifier. You can get help and support for weaning from the dental clinic.



Choose an anatomically shaped pacifier for your child. Pacifiers of other shapes can damage the normal development of the mouth.



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Niitty 2 -project 2023-2026

Working together with immigrant
families for a better everyday life

More information about the project:
<https://projects.tuni.fi/niitty2/>

Family Info material portal:
tuni.fi/perheinfo

This guidance sheet is mainly based on the following sources of
information :

Caries (control). Current Care Guidelines. A working group appointed by
the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim and the Finnish Dental Society
Apollonia. Helsinki: Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, 2020 (retrieved
28.3.2025). Available online: www.kaypahoito.fi

Illustration: Adobe Stock on page 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Picture on page 6 of a child drinking from a glass of water, made with artificial
intelligence(OpenAI. (2023). *ChatGPT* (GPT-4-turbo).

Other photos produced in the Niitty2 project.



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